



# DPI VISTA Monthly

August 2009

"Throughout the centuries there were men who took first steps down new roads armed with nothing but their own vision."

-Ayn Rand

**Jane Grinde**

Project Director

**Betsy Prueter**

Project Coordinator

**Ruth Anne Landsverk**

Family Education Coordinator

**Casey Gauthier**

VISTA Leader

## VISTA Alum Alert



*In mid-August, eleven of our VISTA members will end their service (and one will begin a second year of service as VISTA Leader!)*

*We'd like to take this time to thank each and every one of you for your service, your commitment, and your effort in partnerships in Wisconsin. We wish you the best of luck!*

**Christina Briggs**

Wausau Early Childhood Program

**Penny Bruskin\***

Parents Plus, Milwaukee

**Brendan Gants**

Parents Plus, Milwaukee

**Roxane Hagedorn**

Wausau School District

**Renee Hinn**

Lincoln Elementary School, Oshkosh

**Stephanie Jung**

Parents Plus, Milwaukee

**Kelly Karls**

Howe Neighborhood Family Resource Center, Green Bay

**Kelly Martyka**

South Madison Health and Family Center

**Chad Olle**

Parents Plus, Milwaukee

**Michelle Traxel**

Spooner Middle School

**Kim Yoder**

Parents Plus, Milwaukee

*\*Penny will be continuing her service for a second year as VISTA Leader!*

## Becoming an AmeriCorps Alumnus

*By Betsy Prueter*

Eleven of you, come mid-August, will finish your VISTA service and move on to jobs, graduate school, or more service. You will all officially become AmeriCorps Alumni.



We certainly hope that you will continue to serve in other capacities throughout your lives whether that is with another year in AmeriCorps, through your local church, community non-profit, or in the public schools. We hope that the lessons you learned in VISTA and the experiences you had have inspired you to always be mindful of the challenges and realities of poverty.

As you enter your post-VISTA life, keep in mind that there are several resources available to help you in your job search or connect you to other alums across the country (and in your local community)!

Official AmeriCorps Alumni website:  
<http://www.americorpsalums.org/>  
AmeriCorps Alumni Meetup Groups  
<http://americorpsalumni.meetup.com/>

AmeriCorps Alumni on Facebook  
<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=23996685313>

VISTA on Facebook  
<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2420329608>

AmeriCorps Alumni Resources from CNCS  
[http://www.americorps.gov/for\\_individual/s/alumni/index.asp](http://www.americorps.gov/for_individual/s/alumni/index.asp)

Transition Tips from VISTA Campus  
<http://vistacampus.org/mod/glossary/view.php?id=113>

Follow @americorpsalums on Twitter  
<http://twitter.com/americorpsalums>

In closing, I wanted to share some results from a study published in May by the Corporation for National and Community Service on the benefits of AmeriCorps service. Most people

assume it's those individuals and communities being served who benefit the most. However, this study cites the *AmeriCorps members themselves* as one of the largest beneficiaries of their own service investments. I hope that each of you has gained perspective, insight, and compassion from your year of service and will serve as lifelong ambassadors in your own communities for all national service programs.



## Lessons Learned

*By Ruth Anne Landsverk*

You did it! You made it through your year of VISTA service (two, for some!). This has probably been a year like no other. Forevermore you can recall your year of selfless giving with a certain nostalgia and wistfulness, along with wonderment at how you kept food on the table AND paid the rent (more or less). Even more awe-inspiring is that many VISTAs say they feel as if they received more than they gave!

Following, are a few partnership “lessons learned” shared by outgoing VISTAs. Incoming VISTAs may also find these comments useful.

### **Lesson #1: “Those” are “Us.”**

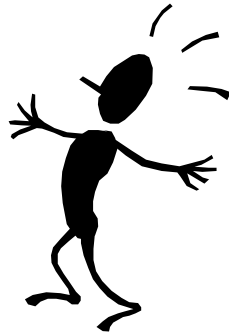
VISTAs will never mutter, “those parents,” accompanied by a roll of the eyes and a shake of the head. “Those” families were the very people you served, advocated for, and felt most at one with. The extended hand, the passing word of encouragement, the shared laugh; those are the partnerships VISTAs built every week in every school they served. VISTAs learned: We are Them.

## **Lesson #2: Co-workers make great allies.**

School staff – the folks in the trenches who worked alongside you everyday – turned out to be great friends, resources, and catalysts. The teachers, aides, school counselors, cafeteria ladies, and maintenance workers were there when you needed them with ideas, supplies, an extra pair of hands, and a smile, to boot. You shared successes, insights, and more than a few sighs on the days when you wondered why you were there and what you were doing. You're really glad that you got to know your co-workers!

## **Lesson #3: Expect the unexpected.**

Not everything turned out as expected, but a lot of good things happened that were unexpected. For example, you got to talk to, work with, and serve real parents and real kids and make a real difference in their lives. You got to see young eyes light up and gray heads nod in understanding. Perhaps the greatest compliment of all: you got to see attitudes change.



**Lesson #4: It's OK to try and fail, but it's failure not to try.** You learned that after that wonderful parent meeting you set up for 7 p.m. the night of the 15-year snowstorm. The treats stayed untouched on their cute, little plates; the speaker spoke nobly and sincerely to the three parents who showed up (the same three who come to every school event); and everyone helped put away the 65 folding chairs erected for the occasion. Being a practitioner of effective partnerships, however, you learned that it is the content of the

workshop that is important, not the attendance. Swallowing hard, you then prepared a short summary for the next school parent newsletter. You took heart from one parent's comment of how useful they found your article, and only imagined how many countless others read it and learned something from it. Most certainly, they did!

**Lesson #5: Humility is greatness.** You know what humility looks like. It looks like the teacher who still didn't know what you did at the end of the year. It sounds like the school staff member who kept forgetting your name. If, indeed, "Life is a long lesson in humility," as James Barrie, creator of Peter Pan, asserted, you are probably off to a good start. It's good to know, however, that humility is also regarded by the wise men of the ages as the parent of wisdom, when we are closest to being our greatest, and, what makes us real. It is also perhaps an essential ingredient in partnerships because we stand stripped of pretense, pride, and censure. Only then, as Albert Einstein observed, are we impervious to being "shipwrecked by the laughter of the gods."

## **Lesson #6: Take a stand.**

It pays to know what your purpose as a VISTA is, to pursue it, and, occasionally, to protect it. Don't be afraid to speak up if you feel something doesn't fit in with the VISTA mission. Sometimes it's necessary to take a stand. So you did.

## **Lesson #7: People are waiting to be connected.**

And you connected them and united them to work for children and families. You were surprised to find people and groups in your community working separately for their particular causes and on their own streets. You started

looking around, noticed the commonalities, and linked them to each other and to you. You helped them become more effective. You sowed the seeds of teamwork which will continue to flourish for years to come, thanks to your hard work, perseverance, and faith in the goodness of your fellow man.

May the lessons learned during your year of partnerships hold you in good stead as you clamber onward.

*"Today is your day!  
Your mountain is  
waiting. So... get on  
your way."  
– Dr. Seuss.*

## Save the Dates!



**September 9-10:  
DPI VISTA Orientation**

**September 10: Get to Know  
Your Site, Checklist, OSOT  
due**

**September 18: Website  
updates due**

## **"Hey! That's a Good Idea!" Corner**

**Casey Gauthier**, serving in the School District of Rhinelander, worked with the District Reading Specialist to put together Kindergarten Kits and distribute them over the summer. These kits include a variety of resources for parents, a "Reading Together" DVD, flash cards of the alphabet and kindergarten sight and spelling words. These kits are handed out to families who have a child entering Pre-K or Kindergarten. **PARENTING**

**Kelly Martyka**, VISTA with the South Madison Health and Family Center, started up a Back Pack Program for low income families, which sends backpacks full of food home every week. She is working with the UW Madison's PEOPLE Program, Second Harvest, Copps, Head Start, and Lincoln School to feed families in need. **COLLABORATING**

**Nicole Stachurski**, serving at Grove Elementary School, set up a "Prize Patrol" program that rewards students for summer reading. The students post a sign in the window of their home that says "I am a Star Reader." When the patrol spots the sign, the student receives a prize. **LEARNING AT HOME**

**Brendan Gants**, VISTA at the Business and Economics Academy of Milwaukee, recently held a fundraiser at Noodles & Co. Fliers were handed out to parents and emails were sent as well. RSVP forms were distributed during an earlier

event and parents were also invited through their child's teacher. A follow-up phone call was given to confirm attendance. All of these modes of communication led to a very successful fundraiser, which brought in nearly \$200 for the ATP. **COMMUNICATING**

## **Welcome New VISTAs!**

*We'd like to extend a warm welcome to our new VISTAs who will begin their service this summer. We look forward to working with them to build strong partnerships across the state.*

### **Abby Churchill**

South Madison Health and Family Center

### **Stephanie Dorman**

West Allis-West Milwaukee School District

### **Sarah Glassman**

Parents Plus, Milwaukee

### **Sara Hubin**

Lakeland Family Resource Center, Spooner

### **Mark Mentele**

West-Allis-West Milwaukee School District

### **Anna Morgen**

School District of Rhinelander

### **Kristine Nadolski**

Wausau School District

### **Angela Rumsey**

Parents Plus, Milwaukee

### **Hannah Schulz**

Parents Plus, Milwaukee

### **Sylvia Sedrak**

Wausau Early Childhood Program

### **Cara Slingerland**

Parents Plus, Milwaukee

### **Becky Smith**

Madison Metropolitan School District

### **Erica Spurgeon**

Green Bay School District/Phuture Phoenix Program

### **Tracy Steffens**

Washington Elementary School, Oshkosh

### **Lauren Stephenson**

Madison Metropolitan School District

### **Josh Cowles**

Fond du Lac Public Library

### **Sara Byrnes**

Fond du Lac Public Library

### **Heather Knops**

Shiocton Public Library

### **Jane Parker**

Shiocton Public Library

### **Mary Anne Simpson**

Montello Public Library (Winnefox Library System)

### **Colleen Douglass**

Vaughn Public Library, Ashland

### **Aaron Deno**

Racine Public Library

### **Elizabeth Lowrey**

Racine Public Library

## **Kick Off a Great Year**

*By Renee Pasewald*

The paid trip to Indianapolis is over, and the free meals and plush hotel rooms have been replaced with food stamps and energy assistance applications. Welcome, new VISTAs, to your year of service! Given the wide range of sites the DPI VISTA project hosts, it is not unusual to feel a little lost after the PSO rug has been unceremoniously torn out from under you. Here are some tips to get you going these first few days and throughout the year.

1. Attend every meeting and site event you can right from Day One. True, the topics may not always be relevant to your assignment and you may not

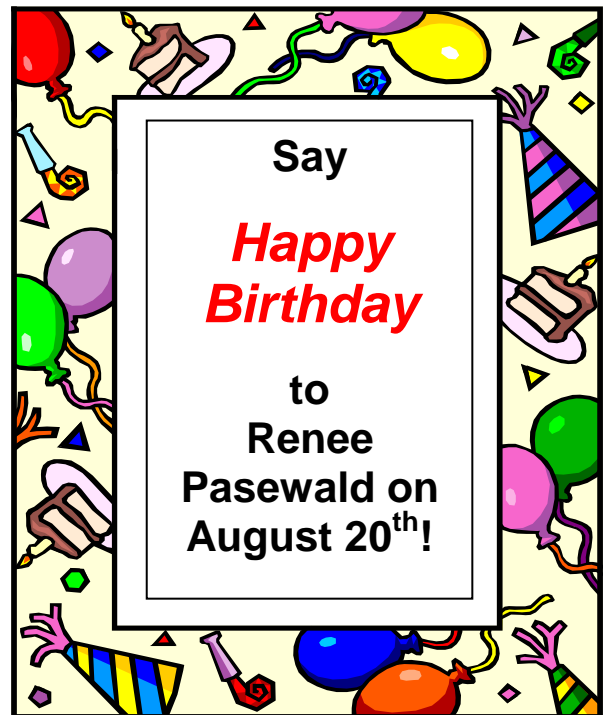
know exactly what to do, but being a constant visible presence among the staff shows them that you are just as committed to the site as they are. This in turn will help them get to know you better and take your efforts seriously.

2. Brag. As a behind the scenes specialist, much of what VISTA does may not be immediately apparent to the people you are working with. So forward your bi-weekly reports to the staff. Write up your recent achievements in the site's newsletter. Talk about what you've been doing at staff meetings. No matter how you do it, share, share, share.
3. Eat in the staff lounge and attend staff social events whenever you can. This does not go unnoticed. Like attending meetings, eating and socializing with everyone will make you more connected to the staff, which makes collaborating with them much easier!
4. Take advantage of every training, conference, seminar, retreat, and professional development opportunity the DPI or your site has to offer. Mileage and lodging are covered, meals are free, and you have a chance to reconnect with other VISTAs across the state. It's a great change of scenery that will keep you refreshed, focused, and energized at your site.
5. Serve one day at a time. Many sites have broad or vague visions that can be difficult to make



sense of. Break down the big projects into small, manageable tasks that are more realistic. One phone call. One letter. One conversation. You may not always be able to do everything, but that's okay, because you can always do something. So find something you *can* do and do it. It does add up!

Finally, keep in mind that the staff needs buy-in from you just as much as you need buy-in from them in order to work together productively. Be open to their advice and ideas, too!





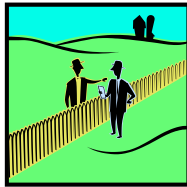
# Starting Out...Just Look Around

By Casey Gauthier

You may have just started your year of service and may be asking, “But where do I start?” In beginning to plan projects and events at my site, I found it very beneficial to research weeks of recognition, nationally recognized days, and community celebrations to get myself (and my site) moving. I have gathered a few examples below. Once you’ve found something that interests you and fits with the goals of your site, get some teachers and parents together and try to brainstorm a project or activity that you can do!

- September 17, Constitution Day  
<http://constitutioncenter.org/ConstitutionDay/>

- Does your site have goals that focus on history of politics? Can you integrate something into the curriculum? Do you have the ability to create an awareness event?



- September 20, National Neighborhood Day  
<http://www.neighborhoodday.org/index2.asp>

- Are you able to help organize a neighborhood-wide gather or celebration? Can you partner with community organizations to promote this to everyone?

- October 4, Intergeneration Day  
<http://www.intergenerationday.org/>
  - Did you know that this year the theme is “Intergeneration Day Means Libraries?” Can you work with the local library to have a family event or involve children in reading to the elderly?
- October 16, World Food Day  
<http://www.fao.org/getinvolved/en/>
  - Do you have the resources to create a cookbook to distribute? Are you able to create partnerships with those that have similar goals?
- November 22-28, National Family Week  
<http://www.nationalfamilyweek.org/>
  - Do you have resources and partners that can help you organize a family night? Can you provide resources to families or partner with a local family resource center?
- December 5, International Volunteer Day  
<http://www.worldvolunteerweb.org/int-l-volunteer-day.html>
  - Can you make volunteer opportunities visible in your community? Are you able to publicly recognize your volunteers with a ceremony or media coverage?

## Grant Opportunities

### **Ronald McDonald House Charities: Grants for Children**



Ronald McDonald House supports programs that help children read, provide nutritious after-school meals, offer life-changing surgeries, or help prevent life-threatening disease. Ronald McDonald House Charities Board of Trustees is most interested in national and/or international organizations that have a specific program related to children's health and wellbeing. Eligibility: 501(c)(3) organizations.

Deadline: September 4, 2009.

<http://rmhc.org/what-we-do/grants/how-to-apply/>

### **Ezra Jack Keats Foundation: Mini-grants**

The Ezra Jack Keats Foundation offers mini-grants to school and public libraries for programs that encourage literacy and creativity in children. Programs relating to the work of Ezra Jack Keats are welcome, but not required.

Eligibility: public schools and libraries located anywhere in the United States, including Puerto Rico and Guam.

Deadline: September 15, 2009.

<http://www.ezra-jack-keats.org/programs/minigrant.html>

### **SOS: Great American Bake Sale**

Share Our Strength's Great American Bake Sale seeks to ensure that low-income children receive nutritious food during critical times when they are out of school and particularly vulnerable to

hunger by increasing participation among low-income children in summer and after-school meal programs. Share Our Strength is specifically interested in increasing participation in meal programs that use USDA reimbursement through the Summer Food Service Program, National School Lunch Program, or Child and Adult Care Food Program. Eligibility: 501(c)(3) organizations, schools with a valid NCES code, or local government entities that work to ensure children have access to after-school and summer meal programs.

Deadline: September 30, 2009.

[http://gabs.strength.org/site/PageServer?pagename=GABS\\_grants](http://gabs.strength.org/site/PageServer?pagename=GABS_grants)

### **The Student Conservation Association: Green Your School Contest**

The Student Conservation Association's Green Your School Contest stimulates and/or identifies conservation service projects designed by high school students that improve, restore, beautify, or conserve their high school environment. Entries will be judged according to the following criteria: the project has or will improve the environmental health of the school; the project is sustainable; the project is initiated by students and engages other students, teachers, and school administrators; the submission itself is of high quality; and the project engaged the community. Eligibility: projects must have been begun after August 1, 2008 and be student-designed.

Deadline: October 9, 2009.

[http://gabs.strength.org/site/PageServer?pagename=GABS\\_grants](http://gabs.strength.org/site/PageServer?pagename=GABS_grants)



**CVS: Caremark Community Grants**

The CVS Caremark Community Grants program awards funds to nonprofit organizations for programs targeting children with disabilities; programs focusing on health and rehabilitation services; and public schools promoting a greater level of inclusion in student activities and extracurricular programs, and initiatives that give greater access to physical movement and play. Additionally, some contributions are made to organizations that provide uninsured individuals with needed care, in particular programs where the care received is of higher quality and delivered by providers who participate in accountable community health care programs. Eligibility: public schools with programs for children under age 18 with disabilities.

Deadline: October 31, 2009.

<http://info.cvscaremark.com/community/our-impact/community-grants>

**Project Learning Tree: GreenWorks! Grants**

Project Learning Tree (PLT) GreenWorks! grants engage PLT educators and their students with their community via "learning-by-doing" environmental projects that involve student leadership, service-learning, and community participation. Maximum Award: \$5,000. Eligibility: Educators who have received PLT training. Project must be youth-planned and -executed, and integrate student learning and community service. It also must include at least one community partner, such as

a local organization or business, and must acquire 50 percent matching funds.

Deadline: October 31, 2009.

[http://www.plt.org/cms/pages/21\\_22\\_21.html](http://www.plt.org/cms/pages/21_22_21.html)

**Wild Ones: Lorrie Otto Seeds for Education Grants**

The Lorrie Otto Seeds for Education Grant Program gives small monetary grants to schools, nature centers, or other non-profit educational organizations for the purpose of establishing outdoor learning centers. Funds will be provided only for the purchase of native plants and seed. Eligibility: schools, nature centers, and other non-profit and not-for-profit places of learning, including houses of worship with a site available for this stewardship project.

Deadline: November 15, 2009.

<http://www.for-wild.org/seedmony.htm>